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An Examination of Bullying Tendencies and Bullying Coping Behaviors among Adolescents

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Abstract

The study aims to examine bullying tendencies and bullying coping behaviors among adolescents in terms of different variables such as gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying. The study was conducted with 402 high school students. The "Bullying Tendency Scale", "Coping with Bullying Scale," and "Personal Information Form" were used to obtain data. The collected data were analysed by MANOVA and t-test. The results of the study revealed that the scores for bullying, bullying tendency, and coping with bullying significantly differed with gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying.

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1. Introduction

Bullying is a substantial research subject as it is currently a widespread phenomenon that constitutes a significant problem (Hotaman & Yüksel-Şahin, 2009). Current research results demonstrate that bullies are prone to psychiatric diseases (Koç, 2006). A relationship exists between psychological distress and bullying (Schneider et al., 2012). During adulthood, bullies are more commonly observed to commit crimes and abuse their spouses and children (Kartal & Bilgin, 2012). In the lack of proper action against bullies, they are known to lead antisocial lives progressing with unstable relationships (Cole, 1995). On the other hand, individuals who are exposed to bullying

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(victims) are adversely affected in terms of physical and psychological health (Koç, 2006). Solitude, diminishing self-esteem, psychosomatic complaints and depression are common among these individuals (Cook, et. al., 2010). And the most tragic outcome of victimization is suicide (Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004). A person who engages in bullying behavior is called a bully, while a person who is exposed to bullying acts is called a victim (Kapçı, 2004). There are also others who are referred to as bully-victims. Such individuals sometimes engage in bullying acts themselves and are sometimes exposed to other people's bullying acts (Pişkin, 2002). It was Olweus who first studied bullying. Olweus labeled bullying with mobbing, meaning intimidation by a group (Swearer et al., 2010: as cited in Polanin, Espelage & Pigott, 2012). Olweus later noticed that the term mobbing does not fully correspond to bullying and therefore switched to the term bullying (Pişkin, 2002). Mobbing is often used for workplace environments, while bullying is a term that is used for the school environment and is relevant to young people (Furlong, et. al., 2010). Bullying is defined as "negative actions repeatedly perpetrated by one or more persons against another person who is relatively weaker. A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself (Olweus, 2008). Bullying encompasses hurtful and negative behaviors intentionally and persistently inflicted upon individuals who are too weak to defend themselves (Korkut, 2004). Such hurtful and negative behaviors range from verbal threats, insulting, name calling, mocking, excluding from a group, damaging the victim's belongings (İlhan-Alper, 2008; Koç, 2006; Pişkin, 2002), to behaviors such as intimidation for the purpose of extorting someone's money or belongings, racial bullying, sexual bullying, and cyber-bullying by phone or through the Internet (Olweus, 2008). They could also involve behaviors that require physical contact, such as hitting, kicking or pinching. Physical harm is classified within the first type of bullying, while social harm constitutes the second type of bullying (Çayırdağ, 2006; Olweus, 2008; Sarıbeyoğlu, 2007; Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004). Involving observable actions, physical and verbal bullying are directly categorized as bullying. On the other hand, social exclusion is defined as indirect bullying. Also referred to as relational aggression, indirect bullying involves behaviors that are not directly observable, such as spreading gossip or threatening to end the friendship unless the victim complies (Alika, 2012; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; as cited in Kapçı, 2004; Kyriakides, Kaloyirou & Lindsay, 2006). Bullies have made a habit of such behaviors, which they will continue to perform unless there is counteraction (İlhan-Alper, 2008). Three main criteria are required for an action to be defined as bullying (Çalık et. al., 2009; Furlong et. al., 2010; Karataş & Öztürk, 2009; Olweus, 2008; Sarıbeyoğlu, 2007). Firstly, an action should be persistent, meaning that the bully needs to perform it continuously over a period of time. Secondly, there should be an unequal balance of power between the two parties. Thirdly, the final requirement is the presence of aggressive behaviors with the intention to deliberately cause harm. For instance; arguments or fights between two individuals with more or less equal physical or intellectual power cannot be defined as bullying, even though they are performed with aggressive intentions (Pişkin, 2002). However, when the same individuals are constantly harassed by certain others, this is called bullying. In a bullying case, a child is stronger than the other, whom he or she harasses using his or her power. And the other child is always weak and desperate (Çayırdağ, 2006). Certain pupils are clearly more at risk of being involved as bullies or victims, or sometimes both (bully/victims), by virtue of personality, family background factors, characteristics such as disability, and the nature and quality of friendships and peer-group reputation (Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004). Individuals who perform bullying acts are most distinctly characterized by the fact that they exhibit aggressive behaviors toward their peers, teachers, and parents. They often choose younger and anxious individuals without friends as their victims. They tell lies very easily (Koç, 2006). They get angry very quickly, have low tolerance, and act impulsively. Individuals performing bullying actions often have parents with low educational and socio-economic levels (Çayırdağ, 2006). Most of these parents do not attend to their children, depriving them of their positive warm care and love. They fail to draw definite lines when their kids exhibit aggressive behaviors, thus allowing them to apply bullying behaviors to their siblings and friends (Olweus, 2008). Research has shown that children who perform bullying acts are often the victims of domestic violence (Sarıbeyoğlu, 2007). It has also been demonstrated that violence, aggression (Şahin, 1998), and bullying as a sub-dimension of aggression (Pişkin, 2002) are learnt during the early stages of life. Therefore, family members who are modeled by a child in every respect and the family circle as the environment for the first years of life play a critical role in the formation and development of a child's personality. Children of parents who treat them in a domineering manner, punish them physically or verbally, lay down strict rules, and impose prohibitions are often found to exhibit unfriendly, hostile, aggressive (Demiriz & Öğretir, 2007), and bullying behaviors. Such children do not display

tolerance towards others because their parents denied tolerance to them (Yörükoğlu, 1994). They develop a rebellious and non-compliant kind of personality (Kulaksızoğlu, 2007) and engage in bullying acts. In their study, Totan & Yöndem (2007) found that the closer the relations of adolescents with their parents, the less their possibility of becoming bullies and bully-victims. People who are exposed to bullying (victims) often lack self-confidence and are anxious and lonely. They usually suffer from headaches, stomach aches, and sleep problems. They lack interest in school (Olweus, 2008) and have low grades. They usually ask for extra money from their parents in addition to their allowance (Olweus, 1995: as cited in Çayırdağ, 2006). They display bedwetting, nail-biting and sleepwalking behaviors. They sometimes have nightmares, which wake them up crying. They act angrily without any obvious reason (Koç, 2006). They have inadequate social skills, have trouble making friends, cannot trust in others, are usually nervous, have low self-esteem, and experience difficulty in defending themselves. They are mostly different from others with regard to ethnicity, language, religion and physical built (Batsche & Knoff, 1994: as cited in Kartal & Bilgin, 2012). Victims' parents may be overprotective (Dilmaç, 2009; Pişkin, 2002).

1.1. Purposes of the study

The study aims to examine bullying tendencies and bullying coping behaviors among adolescents in terms of the variables of gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying.

2. Method

This is a descriptive study.

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted on a total of 402 adolescents (172 female (42.79%) and 230 male (57.21%) attending high school in the province of Istanbul.

2.2. Instruments

The "Bullying Tendency Scale", "Coping with Bullying Scale," and "Personal Information Form" were used to obtain data.

2.2.1. The "Bullying Tendency Scale"

The "Bullying Tendency Scale" developed by Dölek (2002) was employed in the study to determine the students' bullying tendencies. The scale consists of 6 sub-dimensions involving 26 items and is a 4-point Likert-type scale, for which construct validity was established. The sub-dimensions include negative projection, lack of emotional sharing, justification, distressing others, use of power, and being at ease. A high score on the scale indicates a high bullying tendency, while a low score indicates low bullying tendencies. For internal consistency reliability, the scale has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .67. A one-way t-test was also performed between the upper and lower quarters of the sample to determine the scale's internal consistency. The results of the t-test revealed the significance differences between the students from the upper and lower quarters in all dimensions.

2.2.2. Coping with Bullying Scale

The "Coping with Bullying Scale" developed by Dölek (2002) was employed in the study to determine the students' coping with bullying. The scale consists of 6 sub-dimensions involving 24 items and is a 4-point Likert-type scale, for which construct validity was established. The sub-dimensions include the awareness to prevent bullying, standing up to bullying, the awareness to report bullying, awareness to ask for help, awareness not to remain unresponsive, and the awareness to defend oneself. A one-way t-test performed between the upper and lower

quarters of the sample to determine the scale's internal consistency showed significant differences between the students from the upper and lower quarters in all dimensions.

2.2.3. The Personal Information Form

Participants were given the “Personal Information Form” to inquire information on their gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by MANOVA and t- test. In the study, the significance level has been accepted as .05.

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained by a statistical analysis performed on the data collected to solve the research problem. Table 1 gives adolescents' mean scores of bullying tendency and coping with bullying.

Table 1: Adolescents' mean scores of bullying tendency and coping with bullying.

Variable	n	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	%	
						Low	High
Bullying Tendency	402	29	102	54.10	9.71	49.3	50.7
Coping With Bullying	402	46	87	69.95	6.76	49.8	50.2

As seen in Table 1, 49.3% of the adolescents were found to have low bullying tendency level, while 50.7% have high bullying tendencies. On the other hand, 49.8% display a low level of bullying coping behaviors, while 50.2% display a high level of such behaviors. In order to determine whether the adolescents' levels of bullying tendencies and coping with bullying significantly differ with the variables of gender, enjoying to watch violent movies, participation in social activities, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying, a MANOVA analysis was conducted, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The results of the MANOVA analysis according to various variables and level of bullying tendency and coping with bullying

Source	Variables	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F	P
Gender	Bullying Tendency	2795.959	1	2795.959	31.92	.00
	Coping With Bullying	353.120	1	353.120	7.87	.00
	Wilks' Lambda (Λ)= .924, $F(2, 399) = 16.33$, $p < .05$					
Activities	Bullying Tendency	594.038	1	594.038	6.38	.01
	Coping With Bullying	431.097	1	431.097	9.65	.00
	Wilks' Lambda (Λ)= .971, $F(2, 399) = 5.97$, $p < .05$					
ViolentMovie	Bullying Tendency	3094.611	1	3094.611	35.63	.00
	Coping With Bullying	100.975	1	100.975	2.22	.14
	Wilks' Lambda (Λ)= .917, $F(2, 399) = 18.03$, $p < .05$					
Submissive	Bullying Tendency	8.472	1	8.472	.09	.77
	Coping With Bullying	236.362	1	236.362	5.23	.02
	Wilks' Lambda (Λ)= .983, $F(2, 399) = 3.37$, $p < .05$					
Prevention	Bullying Tendency	496.495	1	496.495	5.32	.02
	Coping With Bullying	276.671	1	276.671	6.14	.01
	Wilks' Lambda (Λ)= .979, $F(2, 399) = 4.21$, $p < .05$					

The results of the MANOVA analysis given in Table 2 reveal that the adolescents' scores on bullying tendencies and levels of coping with bullying significantly differ with gender ($\Lambda = .924$, $F(2, 399) = 16.33$, $p < .05$), participation in social activities ($\Lambda = .971$, $F(2, 399) = 5.97$, $p < .05$), enjoying to watch violent movies ($\Lambda = .917$, $F(2, 399) = 18.03$, $p < .05$), being submissive ($\Lambda = .983$, $F(2, 399) = 3.37$, $p < .05$), and the presence of the school

counselor's activities about prevention of bullying ($t = .979$, $F(2, 399) = 4.21$, $p < .05$). A closer look at the ANOVA results as a part of the MANOVA analysis on the variables of gender, participation in social activities, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying showed that this significant difference occurred at a level of $p < .05$ for bullying tendencies and coping with bullying. Similarly, according to the ANOVA results of the MANOVA analysis with respect to watching violent movies, significant difference was obtained at a level of $p < .05$ in bullying tendency, while significant difference occurred at a level of $p < .05$ in coping with bullying according to the ANOVA results of the MANOVA analysis with respect to submissive behavior. In order to determine whether bullying tendencies and coping with bullying significantly differ with gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying, a t-test was performed for independent groups and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The results of the independent group t-test according to various variables and level of bullying tendency and coping with bullying

Variable	n	Bullying Tendencies				Bullying Coping Behaviors			
		M	SD	t	P	M	SD	t	P
Gender									
Female	172	51.05	8.80	5.65	.00	71.03	7.17	2.81	.00
Male	230	56.38	9.75			69.13	6.32		
Activities									
Yes	214	52.96	9.73	2.53	.01	70.92	6.66	3.11	.00
No	188	55.40	9.55			68.84	6.72		
Violence Film									
Yes	239	56.39	9.36	5.97	.00	69.53	6.87	1.49	.13
No	163	50.74	9.25			70.55	6.56		
Submissive									
Yes	28	53.57	11.49	.30	.76	67.14	6.85	2.29	.02
No	324	54.14	9.58			70.16	6.71		
Prevention									
Yes	242	53.20	9.90	2.31	.02	70.62	6.66	2.48	.01
No	160	55.47	9.28			68.93	6.80		

A significant difference was observed between the adolescents' average scores in bullying tendency ($t = 5.65$, $p < .05$) and coping with bullying ($t = 2.81$, $p < .05$) according to gender. Similarly, for participation in social activities, significant difference was found between the average bullying tendency ($t = 2.53$, $p < .05$) and coping with bullying ($t = 3.11$, $p < .05$) scores. There is also significant difference between the adolescents' average bullying tendency ($t = 5.97$, $p < .05$) scores in watching violent movies, while no significant difference was found between their average bullying coping ($t = 1.49$, $p > .05$) scores in the same dimension. No significant difference exists between the adolescents' average bullying tendency ($t = .30$, $p > .05$) scores in submissive behaviors, while their average bullying coping ($t = 2.29$, $p < .05$) scores in the same dimension revealed a significant difference. There was also significant difference between the average bullying tendency ($t = 2.31$, $p < .05$) and coping with bullying ($t = 2.48$, $p < .05$) scores in the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying.

4. Discussion

The present study examined adolescents' bullying tendencies and behaviors of coping with bullying in terms of the variables of gender, participation in social activities, watching violent movies, being submissive, and the presence of the school counselor's activities about prevention of bullying. The results showed that about half of the adolescents in the sample have low bullying tendencies, while the other half have high bullying tendencies. Similarly, about half of the adolescents were found to have low levels of coping with bullying, while the levels are high for the other half. In a study, Dölek (2002) found that 37.9% of the students performed bullying acts and 51.26% were exposed to such acts. In another study, Pişkin (2010) found that 30.2% of the students perpetrated bullying, while 35.1% were victims of bullying acts. The results of the present study revealed significantly high levels of bullying tendencies for the male adolescents, those who do not participate in social activities, those who watch violent movies, and those who stated that their school counselor did not organize any activities to prevent

bullying. On the other hand, the results also revealed significantly high levels of coping with bullying for female adolescents, those participating in social activities, those who do not watch violent movies, non-submissive adolescents, and those stating that their school counselors organized events to prevent bullying. As shown by the study results with respect to gender, the levels of bullying tendencies were found to be significantly higher among male adolescents than females. And female adolescents were found to have significantly higher levels of coping with bullying when compared to males. Other studies in the literature similarly demonstrated that males performed bullying acts Arıman, 2007; Ayas, 2010; Ayas & Pişkin, 2010, 2011; Ayeibow & Akinbod, 2011; Çankaya, 2011; Çayırdağ, 2006; Donat et. al., 2012; Hilooğlu, 2009; Koç, 2006; Kyriakides, Kaloyirou & Lindsay, 2006; Özer, Totan & Atik, 2011; Pişkin, 2002, 2010; Rigby, 1991; Sarıbeyoğlu, 2007) and were exposed to bullying more often than females (Alik, 2012; Ayas, 2010; Kyriakides, Kaloyirou & Lindsay, 2006; Özer, Totan & Atik, 2011; Pişkin, 2002). Furthermore, the present study also found significantly higher levels of coping with bullying for female adolescents when compared to males. The concept of coping involves being active and treating a problem with effective solutions (Eryılmaz, 2009). A broader literature exploring coping with violence suggests that girls are more likely to use relational and assertive responses whereas boys are more likely to use distancing responses or respond with aggression (Johnson et al., 2013). Another finding of the study is that those adolescents who participate in social activities have significantly lower levels of bullying tendencies than those who do not participate in such activities. Also, participants of social activities displayed the significantly higher levels of coping with bullying, a result which points to the importance of social activities. In fact, Dölek (2002) underlines how important it is to participate in various sports, social, and artistic activities both for bullies and their victims in bullying intervention. It would be very useful to encourage such individuals to participate in various activities such as theatre, music, art, and sports. Encouraging victims to participate in various social activities will help them develop trust and make friends. Nevertheless, most schools in Turkey lack convenient halls to organize sports, social, and artistic activities (Hotaman & Yüksel-Şahin, 2009). In a study, Ünal (2006) demonstrated that cooperation is considerably hindered by the fact that there is a lack of protocol-based cooperation between social institutions and schools, services of such institutions are usually offered for certain fees, and many families cannot afford these fees. Yet, it is of great importance to provide bullies and victims with convenient environments in which they could perform various sports, social, and artistic activities. The present study found significantly higher levels of bullying tendencies among the adolescents who watch violent movies than those who do not, a finding which is consistent with the results in the literature. American Academy Of Pediatric (1999) argues that the media, including TV, cinema, computer games, and the Internet are influential in enhancing aggressive behavior in adolescents. Aggressive behaviors are stimulated in individuals who watch aggressive models (Bundy, 2000). Moreover, repeated exposure to violent programs may normalize violent behaviors and lead to desensitization. Research has shown that television teaches violence to children, who imitate aggressive behaviors (Adak, 2004). Bullying is a sub-dimension of aggression (Koç, 2006; Pişkin, 2002; Volk, Camilleri, Dane & Marini, 2012) and a specific type of violent behavior (Kartal & Bilgin, 2012). Thus, aggressive and violent behaviors are enhanced in adolescents who watch violent movies. The present study also revealed that submissive adolescents have significantly lower levels of coping with bullying, a finding that is also consistent with the literature. Submissiveness is defined as an individual's inability to express his or her personal feelings, thoughts or beliefs in a sufficient and effective manner, to stand up to others who violate his or her rights, and to defend himself or herself (Erdoğan & Oto, 2004). People who hesitate to act freely and submit to others due to fear of criticism, reproach, etc. have low self-confidence (Can, 1998). Hence, low levels of ability to cope with bullying. In fact, it has been demonstrated by research that victims of bullying have low self-efficacies (Özer, Totan & Atik, 2011), low self-esteem (Kyriakides, Kaloyirou & Lindsay, 2006), negative self-perceptions and are shy (Ayas & Pişkin, 2002), timid, introvert, nervous, and passive (Koç, 2006) individuals. As shown by the results of the present study, the adolescents who stated that their school counselors organize events to prevent bullying have significantly lower levels of bullying tendencies and significantly higher ability levels of coping with bullying. This finding points to the importance of offering psychological counseling and guidance services for the youth. Koç (2006) found that 72% of bullying acts occur at school, while only 28% of bullying cases occur out of school. Therefore, school counselors should organize effective efforts to prevent bullying and for bullying intervention. Bullying intervention programs at schools should aim the following: to reduce bullying acts among the students in school, to prevent bullying acts from occurring, to improve peer relationships (Olweus, 2008), to intervene in and stop bullying acts, and to rehabilitate student victims (Koç, 2006). Efforts to prevent the victim-

bully problem are made at school and classroom level, as well as at individual and community levels (Olweus, 2004, 2008). Bullying intervention programs to prevent bullying at school level should include the following: Bullying Prevention Commissions should be established at schools; school rules should be made clear to all; school personnel, students, and parents should be trained about bullying and coping with bullying (Limber et al, 2004), school personnel should carefully observe students during recesses and lunch breaks and immediately intervene whenever a bullying act is observed in a student (Ayas, 2010). A majority of teachers report that bullying acts most often occur in the school yard, corridors, classrooms, and restrooms, respectively. So these areas should be observed and directly controlled by teachers (Kartal & Bilgin, 2009; Koç, 2006). Intervention methods in the classroom include defining the rules and sanctions against bullying acts (İlhan-Alper, 2008), teachers acting as good role models and creating a warm classroom environment (Koç, 2006); and organizing classroom meetings with parents. Individual intervention methods include supervising students' activities and conducting serious talks with students involved in bullying (Limber, 2011; Olweus & Limber, 2010). Such methods should also involve the efforts to improve adolescents' self-esteem; helping them control their anger and express it in a convenient way (Koç, 2006); helping them gain communication skills (Totan & Yöndem, 2007); offering psychological counseling to student bullies and victims; and refer them to a psychiatrist when necessary. Social intervention involves promoting positive role models, launching campaigns (Ayas, 2010), and raising awareness about bullying through the media.

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